

VZCZCXRO6301
OO RUEHDBU RUEHPW RUEHSL
DE RUEHBY #0063 0242308
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 242308Z JAN 10
FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2573
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEHBN/AMCONSUL MELBOURNE IMMEDIATE 6940
RUEHPT/AMCONSUL PERTH IMMEDIATE 5207
RUEHDN/AMCONSUL SYDNEY IMMEDIATE 5216

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 000063

SIPDIS
NOFORN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/25/2020
TAGS: PARM PREL MARR MOPS AS AF
SUBJECT: ON AFGHANISTAN, THE WAITING IS THE HARDEST PART

REF: A. A:CANBERRA 1103
B. B:CANBERRA 1042

Classified By: Acting Pol Counselor James Applegate for reasons 1.4(b)(d)

¶1. (C/NF) SUMMARY: DFAT and AusAID officials report that Australia is still months away from rolling out its planned civilian surge in Afghanistan. A final announcement is now not expected until March at the earliest. Officials expressed frustration at the slow pace and do not expect that anything will be finalized in advance of the London conference. There is still a chance that senior cabinet officers will make some decisions within the next week, but more than likely debate will be folded into the annual budget process which doesn't even get underway until February. END SUMMARY.

No Progress Apparent

¶2. (C/NF) Australia has made little to no progress towards finalizing plans to increase its civilian presence in Afghanistan. Officials from the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) both reported that Cabinet-level discussions have been moving slowly. Despite a recent push to have something ready in advance of the London Conference, Afghanistan Section Director Paul Noonan of DFAT does not expect that any specifics will be finalized by then. Frustrated by the apparent lack of progress, Noonan said that the uncertainty about the security situation and budget concerns have played a role in the delay, but are not the primary concerns. Noonan and Sonia Litz, Afghanistan Section Director for AusAID, both said that details of the plan have not solidified much more than when Rudd made his initial announcement at the end of last November.

Announcement Pushed Back

¶3. (C/NF) The expected time frame for the announcement of a final plan continues to be pushed further back. In a December meeting, Special Envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan Ric Smith forecast that a final decision could be expected in February (reftel A). Now both Noonan and Litz are predicting that the Australian government will not be ready to announce specific numbers until March at the earliest. While Noonan would not rule out the possibility that the Cabinet will make a decision in time for the conference, he said that the chances are slight at best. He hinted that DFAT is at odds with the Finance and Aid Ministers as to how to proceed with the planning. The latest plan is to fold the civilian strategy for Afghanistan into the standard annual budget process which will not even begin until February.

Background

¶4. (C/NF) During a visit to the United States in late November of last year Rudd announced that Australia would be increasing its civilian presence in Afghanistan. The plan is to send additional diplomats, aid workers, and police trainers. Australia had initially hoped to roll out a further civilian contribution to closely follow on the heels of President Obama's speech. The government has ruled out any increase in Australia's military commitment in Afghanistan and offered an enhanced civilian effort in place of more troops. Initially optimistic, officials have become gradually less so in predicting when the civilian strategy in Afghanistan would be finalized. All the relevant agencies, DFAT, AusAID and the Australian Federal Police (AFP), have submitted proposals for debate within the Cabinet, but none have received any feedback as to what the final program will look like.

Comment

¶5. (C/NF) Originally seen as an easy deliverable that could substitute for troop increases, the debate over the details of the civilian strategy have dragged on much longer than anyone predicted. The delays suggest that there is some internal disagreement within the government. Given the apparent lack of progress, it is possible that the rollout of a plan will continue to be delayed.

BLEICH